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'Stranger' in a strange land: A phenomenological approach to historical cross-cultural research

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ABSTRACT

We adopt Schütz's phenomenological approach to address the obstacle of undertaking empirical historical research where archival material is limited, or absent. As a philosophy, operationalised through the 'Stranger' – an individual who enters an unfamiliar social world – our phenomenological approach contributes to greater levels of historiographical reflexivity and dual integrity advocated in business history research. We research the past through empirical work undertaken by the lead author who, in the absence of archives, conducted interviews with senior managers across a range of industries and businesses to explore how the traditions and values of the indigenous people (*Imazighen*) have influenced management practice in Morocco. Our abductive exploration demonstrates how the 'Stranger' becomes a valuable cross-cultural research tool, enabling the researcher to enter the 'lived reality' of those who experience the phenomenon under investigation, and to do history in a way that allows the voices of the silenced to be heard.

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Introduction

Our paper contributes to this special issue of *Business History* which seeks to shed new light on the business history of less developed countries' contexts through methodologically and conceptually innovative studies which have overcome the challenges of studying societies with limited archival sources, and even silences. This fills a void left by the missing voices from archival collections (Decker, 2013). The objective of our research is to set out how we overcame these challenges *via* a phenomenological approach that offers greater levels of historiographical reflexivity and dual integrity advocated in business history research. In doing so, we contribute fresh methodological insight that extends our knowledge of lesser-known countries within the discipline of business history. We explore Morocco, a context which has received scant attention in business and management research in general, and business history in particular (Beduneau-Wang & Soumane, 2025; Benson & Al Arkoubi, 2006; Forster, 2014). It is a socio-historical context in which archives have been lost, destroyed, or limited in whose history they record (Ahmed, 2018). The archives are particularly silent on the influence that the culture of the indigenous people of Morocco – the *Imazighen* – has had on business practices.

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We respond to the call to approach business history from new directions to seek 'different kinds of knowledge about the past' (Decker et al., 2015, p. 35), by adopting Schütz's (1944) phenomenological approach to explore these archival silences. Scholars (Cruz, 2014; Heller, 2023; Maclean et al., 2017; McKinlay, 2013; Rowlinson et al., 2014) have moved 'history as told to history as experienced' (Lubinski, 2018, p. 1803). Regardless of their specific context of interest, scholars engaging from 'new directions' have broadly used interpretivist approaches, such as ethnography (Sharpe, 2004), retrospective organisational history (Cruz, 2014), and organisational source criticism (Heller, 2023), amongst others. This consciously addresses the shortcomings of traditional research methods, which mainly involve reliance on the study of archives. These new interpretive approaches enable scholars to 'assemble and establish credible versions of what happened and why' (Whittle & Wilson, 2015, p. 49), balancing the research questions, trustworthiness of narratives (Gill et al., 2018), oral histories, and participant observation, with a sound anchoring in the past – the archives themselves (Decker, 2013). In so doing they bring fresh insight and understanding of the past that can be used to better understand the present. Moreover, 'doing history' in this way allows the voices of those who have 'been ignored, marginalised or silenced' (Haynes, 2010, p. 221) to be heard.

We evidence our phenomenological approach as another new path forward for business history in research undertaken by the lead author that explores sociocultural influences on management practice in Morocco. We take Schütz's (1944) concept of the 'Stranger' to support the reflexivity and trustworthiness of the researcher, providing enhanced cross-cultural insight and understanding in the absence of appropriate archives (Armstrong, 1991). The motivation for this research was to develop a greater understanding of how different cultural contexts are embedded within business practices, and in doing so provide greater knowledge and understanding of geopolitical regions that business historians have found difficult to access and document (Verhoef, 2017), such as the business history of Morocco. Whilst we know from the limited extant research on management in Morocco that the *Imazighen*, the indigenous people of Morocco, and their cultural traditions and values have influenced business and management practices, significantly how they have done so has not been explored (Benson & Al Arkoubi, 2006). To learn lessons, and to extend our knowledge of business in this societal context, it is important to find out how and to what extent *Amazigh* culture influenced practice. We take the researcher's status as a 'Stranger in a strange land' and turn it into a tool for developing a more nuanced understanding of the sensitivities and limitations of researching the complex, cross-cultural context of Morocco, where there is an absence of archives.

We position our international research within cross-cultural management, alongside those who in their own research take cognisance of the role of historical, political, and institutional factors in shaping how culture influences management, achieving greater insights as a result (Romani et al., 2018). Eschewing the positivist approach, such as the work of Hofstede, the focus of which is comparing national traits, the overriding premise of our position is to explore, and make sense of how culture is actively constructed and negotiated in specific organisational and social contexts. Our approach highlights how individuals' perceptions of management styles vary depending on their own socio-historical contexts (Dupuis, 2014). In doing so, our research answers a growing call both for a move in business history research towards more interpretive approaches (Decker et al., 2015; Kipping et al., 2014) and in the international sphere (Cruz, 2014; Decker, 2013; Verhoef, 2017). We address a specific research

question: *in the absence of archives, how can Schütz's phenomenological approach provide insight into the influences of the Imazighen on management practice in Morocco.*

In Africa – the socio-historical context in which we demonstrate our contribution to this special issue – scholars report a number of challenges they face undertaking authentic business history research. Verhoef (2017, p. 2) talks of the marginalisation of business in Africa in the international literature on business history. Extant business history, she argues, does not address the ‘textured composition or development trajectory, because the focus [is not] Africa but the domicile of the foreign firm’. Taking a broader historiographical approach, there has admittedly been a surge in interest by African and Western scholars in African economic history. For example, Tiyyembe Zeleza (2021) has contributed extensively to our understanding of African economic development, whilst Jerven (2014) has rigorously analysed growth rates across several African countries, Fourie and Garmon (2023) have provided deep insights into settlers’ living standards, and Velasco (2022) has analysed commercial banking competition in Kenya. Nevertheless, Decker (2013) explains how ultimately in Africa there is no real interest in history, as a consequence of which records are not deposited in public archives but remain in private hands, if they exist at all (Ahmed, 2018). Archives can also be lost, widely dispersed or inaccessible. As Cruz (2014) discovered in her investigation of Liberian market women’s experiences of trauma, in these developing countries there is a preference for word-of-mouth transactions rather than the written word. Archives can also be handicapped either with the unbalanced weight of colonial era records or because of a ‘forceful strategy of resistance’ brought about by a legacy of distrust (Ahmed, 2018, p. 435).

We demonstrate how our methodological approach – that of phenomenology, operationalised through Schütz’s (1964) ‘Stranger’ – enables us to engage with these contextual challenges and identify strategies to overcome them. We argue that our approach sheds new light on the business history of a hitherto relatively unexplored developing country, Morocco, and in doing so we show our commitment to business history’s pledge to widen and deepen its international scope. Our phenomenological research is located in what Maclean et al. (2016) refer to as ‘historical organisation studies’ (Bucheli & Wadhwani, 2014; Maclean et al., 2025), more specifically, retrospective organisational history (Decker et al., 2021). It is a mode of enquiry on how to research the past in business and management, including, as we have previously stated, cross-cultural management, which ‘seeks to use interviews and recollections as alternative historical sources (Decker et al., 2021, p. 1146). Its focus on silenced, lost or undocumented forms of history makes it particularly useful when there is a ‘silence’ in the archives, or when researching marginalised groups (Decker, 2013).

Our choice of position within the retrospective organisational history sphere to shed light on under-researched countries is also supported by the work of Decker (2022, p. 10). Like Romani et al. (2018), she is critical of the limited ‘methodological repertoire’ in international business, in particular its heavy reliance on mostly quantitative methods. She asserts that this restricts the field’s ability to ask new questions and to develop innovative theories, thus holding back its ‘intellectual contribution’ (Decker, 2022, p. 2). We agree with Decker (2022), that international business research, which includes cross-cultural management research, requires methodological expansion. Our new methodological approach answers this call to find new and innovative ways to research African socio-historical contexts, especially in the absence of archives. There are numerous ethnographical studies that have used interviews

and recollections (Coller et al., 2016; Jarzabkowski et al., 2023; Larsen, 2019). Our approach differs, in that the specific *existential* phenomenological approach of Schütz (Belvedere, 2013) enables us to use retrospective accounts to create the historiographical reflexivity recommended to enable theorisation. In addition, this allows the development of a method for researching the past (Decker et al., 2021, p. 1124), employing constructive, trustworthy historical narratives (Gill et al., 2018).

We have structured this paper as follows. First, we outline the phenomenological approach to research and its importance for business historians. Next, we establish the significance of Schütz's (1944) 'Stranger' as a valuable method for operationalising phenomenological historical research in the absence of archives. This is followed by an outline of the context of Morocco and the absence of archives. We then outline our methodological approach. Next, we demonstrate how, in the absence of archives, our deployment of the 'Stranger' in our empirical research in Morocco allowed the researcher to enter the 'life-worlds' of those who experience the phenomenon under investigation, enabling us to uncover 'silences' and make sense of socio-historical management practices in Morocco. We conclude with a summary of our contribution and outline avenues for future research.

The phenomenological approach to research

Theory and philosophical ideas shape method by grounding assumptions about reality, knowledge, and values, which in turn determine what questions are asked and how they can be answered (Williamson, 2021). In this way, method is the practical translation of theoretical and philosophical commitments into coherent procedures of inquiry or action (Howell, 2012). Broadly speaking, phenomenology is defined as 'both a philosophical movement and a family of qualitative research methodologies... [it is] the study of phenomena, where a phenomenon is anything that appears to someone in their conscious experience' (Gill, 2014, p. 119). We say broadly because the phenomenologist movement reflects a number of approaches and 'there is no such thing as *the one* phenomenology' (Heidegger, 1988, p. 328).

Schütz shares the phenomenological commitment to explore and examine experiences from the point of view of the 'experiencer' (Gill, 2014, p. 128). However, his additional commitment to understand the taken-for-granted everyday world we all inhabit and to focus on how our 'knowledge' of everyday life has been 'developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations' (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 15) is what sets him apart. The phenomenology of Schütz is *existential* phenomenology – a 'phenomenology of the social world' (Schütz, 1966, p. xxxi) – in which genuine understanding means the intentional grasping of the experience of the other... possible in face-to-face 'we-relations' (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 245) dependent on direct exchange and interaction. He thus attempts to link phenomenology and sociology in an analysis of our everyday world, our 'life-world' (Schütz, 1966). Here, the guarantee of 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of Schütz's 'life-world' is 'a universe of significations to us', or an intersubjective socio-historical 'framework of meaning' which is capable of being examined (Schütz, 1962, p. 135). He has been characterised as a 'phenomenological sociologist', but he also taught philosophy, and nearly all of his publications are clearly philosophical scholarship or investigations. Essentially, though, at the core of his work was a belief that there was more to be learned about human knowledge from the social and the cultural than there was from the naturalistic sciences (Walsh, 1967).

Schütz's (1962) philosophy of the social sciences is wide-ranging – extending to all disciplines including history. Its essential function is to be interpretive, to understand the subjective meaning of social action, achieved by the we-relations and the subsequent intersubjectivity of our socio-historical life-worlds mentioned previously.

We propose that our phenomenological approach will enrich the current suite of methods currently used in business history because of how closely it is aligned to the historiographical approach (Tröhler, 2019). Historiography, the study of how history is written – including the theoretical and methodological approaches, interpretations and perspectives used by historians – seeks to understand how the trustworthiness (Gill et al., 2018) of changing narratives has been influenced by cultural, political and ideological contexts. According to Collingwood (1946/1993), it is a history of imagination. Collingwood (1946/1993, p. 7) posits that because we cannot observe human events that have already taken place, we must imagine them. Imagining, he argues, is not necessarily related to the fictitious, and does not have to be about the 'unreal'. Instead, history is a kind of research or inquiry that requires an 'interpretation' of evidence for the purposes of human self-knowledge. The value of history, he argues, is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what he is.

The resonance between the phenomenology of Schütz and the historiography of Collingwood (1946/1993) is manifest, with both scholars contesting that to understand socio-historical contexts we must 'interpret' to understand the subjective meaning of social action. Put simply, why does man do what he does in his unique temporal and cultural framework? Schütz himself talks of historians, who, in the absence of the direct we-relationship needed to directly understand from the point of view of the insider, yet still provide us with insight into how our predecessors have influenced our social world (Schütz, 1932). Whilst phenomenology is not a panacea for all methodological gaps or supplants existing qualitative approaches (Gill, 2014), it does, as both a philosophy and a methodology, contribute to greater levels of historiographical reflexivity and the 'dual integrity' – the combination of both theorising and veracity of evidence – advocated in some business history research (Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014). We will look more closely at the concept of reflexivity before further discussion on phenomenology as a useful approach in the absence of archives.

In all qualitative studies, it is incumbent on the researcher to understand how reflexivity is operationalised throughout their work (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). For the purposes of this research, we have drawn on the works of Cunliffe (2016), Bourdieu (Grenfell, 2014; Guttormsen & Moore, 2023), and Maclean and Harvey (2025), whose views align in seeing reflexivity as essential to unsettling the taken-for-granted, situating individual sensemaking within wider structural and historical contexts, and in doing so providing us with a rich foundation for cross-cultural research where archives are absent. Cunliffe's (2016) definition of reflexivity involves two levels: self-reflexivity, the examining of one's own beliefs, values, and assumptions; and critical reflexivity, the questioning of organisational practices, social structures and knowledge bases. Her's is an intersubjective ontology which emphasises that reflexivity is about ethical, relational responsibility and not just individual reflection, for 'we are never wholly separate' (p. 742) and '*being* reflexive is about having 'a heart'. ... it is a way of being in relation with others that brings with it moral and ethical considerations. It requires us to be solicitous and respectful of differences' (p. 742). Her belief chimes with that of Bourdieu, who insists the researcher has 'a moral' commitment. ... that demands a certain vigilance concerning the art of researching' (Grenfell, 2014, p. 213). This commitment includes interrogation of one's

positionality – socially, historically and institutionally – which mediates access to knowledge, influences interpretation and impacts the ethical dynamics of representation (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023). Reflexivity, as a continuous process of questioning and learning, enables the researcher to uncover new realities and meanings, ensuring the research remains true to the participants' authentic world view, i.e. 'how the data speaks' (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023, p. 549). Maclean and Harvey (2025) extend the reflexive debate temporally, arguing for multi-temporal reflexivity, where personal, organisational and societal histories combine to inform current practice and future direction. In summary, for a researcher undertaking cross-cultural study in contexts where archives are absent, these authors provide a framework to ensure that any research undertaken produces richer, more critical accounts that honour local experiences yet also set them within the broader social and historical dynamics in play.

Returning to our argument for a phenomenological approach, whilst it is true that phenomenology is not dissimilar to the ethnographic approaches already shaping retrospective organisation history (Cruz, 2014; Maclean et al., 2016), yet it remains distinct in its philosophical orientation. Whereas ethnography is regarded as a methodological practice, phenomenology provides the researcher with both a theoretical and philosophical foundation for understanding lived social experience (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Its focus on that lived experience is strengthened through the form of reflexivity previously discussed which ensures that any accounts of that experience are sensitive to the researcher's positionality, assumptions and the broader interrelationships that shape meaning (Cunliffe, 2016). Although the two approaches share the same data collection practices – such as interviews, participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), and reflexive diaries (Cassell & Symon, 2004) – they diverge ontologically and epistemologically. The philosophical stance of phenomenology is the belief that subjective experience cannot be separated from the natural world, thus challenging the divide enforced by scientific naturalism. Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved with the objective (Moran, 2002). It is precisely this position that empowers phenomenology together with both elements of reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2016) to address deeper interpretive questions and expand the methodological imagination in business history (Collingwood 1946/1993).

Thus, we argue that Schütz's phenomenology offers two key contributions to the advancement of business history per se, and the international stretch of this journal specifically. First, it can be regarded as a robust and critically reflexive approach that answers Decker et al.'s (2021) call for innovative approaches to historiography. Second, the operationalisation of his concept of the 'Stranger' permits a rigorous evaluation of researcher trustworthiness (Gill et al., 2018), including the interrogation of one's positionality socially, historically and institutionally which influences interpretation and representation (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023) that is so important in international and cross-cultural contexts. As both a philosophy and a methodology, phenomenology strengthens the intellectual foundations of our discipline and opens new avenues for inquiry.

The 'Stranger'

Schütz's (1964, p. 91) concept of the 'Stranger' refers to an adult attempting to be accepted by a group of which they are not yet a part. This can include someone meeting a partner's family, joining a club, or, most relevant here, an immigrant trying to navigate an unfamiliar world. Because the 'Stranger' lacks the group's ingrained cultural knowledge or 'tested

systems of recipes; they cannot rely on 'thinking-as-usual' (Schütz, 1964, p. 96). This outsider perspective allows the 'Stranger' to offer fresh insights into a culture often invisible to insiders, challenging the tried and tested recipes of this world, while at the same time providing the necessary levels of trustworthiness for our phenomenological approach. Schütz explains that both social science and everyday life rely on 'types'—mental models that guide our understanding of others (Natanson, 1970). Whilst these can be useful, they risk being treated as objective facts rather than subjective constructs (Conklin, 2007).

As an example, Schütz identifies three 'types' in relation to a city: the 'person on the street,' who navigates easily used tacit knowledge; the 'cartographer,' who knows the city in theory, but lacks lived experience; and the 'Stranger,' who must consciously interpret and learn the social norms to function. This last figure is the most reflective and analytical. Examples of the 'Stranger' include a future son-in-law, a club applicant, or a city dweller relocating to the countryside. What unites them is a state of 'crisis'—caused by their unfamiliarity with the group's cultural pattern and lack of shared historical experience (Schütz, 1944). Each group has its own customs, laws, and language – the 'recipes' that guide social behaviour (Schütz, 1944, p. 501). Put simply, 'the social group' know it and the 'Stranger' does not know it and 'crisis' occurs when the 'Stranger' tries to enter this unknown social world (Colville et al., 2014). What makes it even more challenging for the 'Stranger' is that he or she attempts to make sense of this new social environment in terms of his/her own thinking which includes the existing pre-perceptions of the group the 'Stranger' is attempting to enter. These pre-perceptions, or ready-made ideas, Schütz (1944, p. 503) informs us, often prove to be inadequate because for the most part they do not reflect the 'real' 'vivid experience and social interaction' to which the 'Stranger' is now exposed.

Central to Schütz's idea is the Immigrant as the 'Stranger' – one whose cultural reference points are misaligned with the new society's private, often unteachable, codes. Understanding a culture involves more than translation; it requires immersion in shared traditions, like literature or religion, that shape everyday meanings. The 'Stranger' must rely on group members to clarify what insiders take for granted. They cannot settle for vague understandings but must investigate not only what is done but why (Schütz, 1944, p. 506). As Horgan (2012, p. 607) puts it, the 'Stranger' exists in 'a peculiar mixture of physical proximity and social distance.' This distance enables objectivity and critical questioning, revealing cultural contradictions and inconsistencies. This outsider status gives the 'Stranger' not only analytical distance but also the courage to question and challenge the group's cultural norms. For Schütz, the group's cultural pattern is not a safe haven but a field of inquiry. This idea – of the 'Stranger' as investigator – is a powerful foundation for our empirical research and an important lens for exploring cross-cultural settings, especially where archival material is scarce. The outsider perspective is particularly important when exploring 'how other disciplines may help us work against the grain' when contemplating records as evidence' (Whatley & Brown, 2009, p. 129).

Although the concept of 'otherness' and the 'Stranger' is not new in management and cross-cultural research, it is often treated as a methodological hurdle, or barrier to trustworthiness, rather than a valuable tool. For Schütz (1944), the 'Stranger' embodies otherness by entering a social world whose taken-for-granted meanings and norms are unfamiliar. This position highlights the tension between belonging and exclusion, making the Stranger a figure through which the dynamics of difference and otherness are revealed. We seek to show how the researcher can through critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2016; Grenfell, 2014)

become the Stranger using their ‘otherness’ to provide ‘trustworthiness and credibility’ (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023, p. 531). Whilst the insider–outsider dichotomy is frequently critiqued because researcher positionality can oversimplify complex relationships between the researcher and the researched (Brockhoff & Kipnis, 2014; Guttormsen & Moore, 2023), scholars have used the ‘Stranger’ successfully. Hultgren (2013), for instance, applies Schütz’s idea to study immigrants in Swedish education, using the ‘Stranger’ metaphor for both researcher and participant. Gherardi (1996) reinterprets the concept in terms of gender, identifying types of ‘visitors’ within organisational cultures. Such approaches reject rigid insider/outsider binaries, suggesting that researchers can occupy both roles simultaneously (Duku, 2007) or dwell in a ‘third space’ – a boundary where different cultural worlds intersect (Bhabha, 1994; McNess et al., 2015). Duku (2007) exemplifies this by reflecting on her research in South Africa, where shared cultural capital made her an insider, but language barriers and professional status created distance. She identifies with multiple roles—teacher, guest, woman, intruder—highlighting the layered nature of identity and the limits of binary categorisation.

McNess et al. (2015) support this multidimensional view, advocating in favour of a continuum of positionality shaped by factors like ethnicity, gender, and academic background. Their work builds on Bhabha’s ‘third space’ to explore hybrid identities in global higher education, rejecting simplistic notions of objectivity or embeddedness. McNess et al. (2015) stress the importance of these distinctions, ultimately embracing a non-binary perspective that sees ‘Stranger-ness’ as fluid and contextual. Gurvitch’s notion of everyday knowledge—shaped by social norms—illustrates how even ‘Strangers’ rely on familiar frameworks whilst critiquing dominant understandings (Balandier, 1975). Schütz himself viewed the ‘Stranger’ as a flexible, non-exclusive identity. In methodological terms, it is the flexibility which makes the ‘Stranger’ a valuable research tool in generating trustworthy research. Additionally, it fosters dialogic, ethically conscious research that balances insider insight with outsider critique (Fitzsimmons, 2014). Researchers, therefore, can embody varying degrees of ‘Strangeness’ by entering new cultures, conducting ethnography, studying tight-knit groups, or engaging with subcultures (Brewer, 2004; Cheong et al., 2015; Colville et al., 2014; Holden et al., 2008).

Our researcher was such a ‘Stranger’ – immersed in Moroccan culture through repeated visits yet still viewed as an outsider due to different lived experiences. Her gender also influenced how she was perceived, and she experienced the ‘shock’ of navigating a new socio-cultural setting (Chirkov, 2023).

Morocco and the absence of archives

The Kingdom of Morocco is a singular country which has been able to ‘preserve its rich heritage’ and yet be ‘one of the Arab countries most open to Western values and intellectual movements’ (Benson & Al Arkoubi, 2006, p. 276). There is little research, however, on how management is practised in this country not only in the discipline of business history, but also in international business and cross-cultural management. The absence of Morocco on business scholars’ radar is somewhat remiss when considering the country’s historical trading background as part of the Silk Road (Pereira et al., 2025); the Arab Invasions of the 7th and 8th Centuries AD (Pennell, 2003); and more recently, Proctor & Gamble’s entry into Morocco

in 1958–60, followed swiftly by Unilever in 1962. Morocco has recently been seeking to establish itself as a hub for shipping, logistics and finance, with over 150 US companies operating there, especially in renewable energy, infrastructure, aviation, and environmental technologies (US State Department, 2023). It would appear to be succeeding in its economic goals as Tanger-Med, Morocco's industrial port complex, was awarded the *Financial Times* Global Free Trade Zone of the Year in 2020, contributing as it did US\$6 billion to the Moroccan economy in 2019 (Verhoef, 2021). We consequently argue that Morocco should be a country of interest to scholars wanting to learn lessons from less developed countries.

However, as Decker (2013) has already noted and experienced by Cruz (2014), there are a number of challenges when exploring less developed countries, not least the absence of archives. Indeed, fundamental questions need to be asked about who has put them together, the barriers created and possible misperceptions about how business has emerged, operated and evolved in the country. Ahmed (2018) explains that Morocco is not a culture that has encouraged the development of a sense of archival responsibility. This is not, he says, necessarily through a destruction of archives but more a long history of neglect, a disdain for a paper trail and the preference for word-of-mouth transactions. The latter is particularly true of our subject of interest, the *Amazigh* people (Baïda, 2013). Furthermore, archives in Morocco are often privately owned – in private libraries and in homes – with owners proving unwilling to share their collections 'owing to a myriad of concerns including privacy, sentimentality and fears of theft or confiscation' (Ahmed, 2018, p. 261).

Archival development is also excessively shrouded in colonial and post-colonial biases that demonstrate graphically a key feature of this special issue, namely, records are kept and maintained not only by those in power, but also to serve specific (political) purposes (Cook & Schwartz, 2002). Critically, such archives omit experiences and voices that might otherwise go unheard. This is extensively analysed by Ahmed (2018), quoting Miller (2016, p. 257), who concluded that '[in] Morocco, until very recently, both the creation of archives and the formation of historians to work in them have been flawed processes'. Indeed, both the French colonial authorities and the Moroccan rulers after the 1956 Revolution created archives related only to their specific requirements (Ahmed, 2018). The objective of the French was to provide a picture of life in Morocco. However, their approach was regarded as a strategy of divide-and-rule, distinguishing *Imazighen* (the indigenous people of Morocco) from Arabs in both religion and cultural heritage (Cohen & Jaidi, 2006, p. xi). They even provided the *Imazighen* with their own legal system (Munson, 1993). The objective of the Moroccan rulers, on the other hand, was to support their master narrative of an Arab-Islamic identity (Gellner, 1969), viewing Morocco as now part of the 'Great Arab Maghreb' and formalising Arabic as the official language (Sater, 2016, p. 68).

Only in 2007 was the *Archives de Maroc* established, with the aim of collecting material that would provide deeper insights into the history of twentieth century Morocco (Archives du Maroc, 2025). However, the bulk of this material covers the *Fonds Protectorat* dealing with the colonial economy, public works, and administrative or legislative matters. Although there are other depositories in Rabat, they are primarily concerned with Royal lineages and do not cover any aspect of the focus of our research, Moroccan business and management (Cornwell, 2015). Just from this brief summary, we can identify that a highly influential element of the socio-historical context of Morocco – and especially material on its indigenous people, the *Imazighens* – has frequently been absent and silenced in the archival record.

Archival documents and Amazigh culture

In our search for relevant archives, we consulted a number of primary source materials found in archives; namely, the Archives du Maroc (Ahmed, 2018), and reports from organisations external to Morocco such as the World Bank and the European Union (European Commission, 2011; World Bank, 1997, 2001, 2025). Whilst these organisations have developed partnerships to help the country reduce its poverty, improve its economy and to enhance the standard of living of their people, they are limited in scope, thus reinforcing the core problem for business historians when researching management and business practices. The World Bank has been supporting Morocco since the 1970s on economic initiatives, producing a succession of reports that closely monitored the country's economic development (World Bank, 2001). However, the bulk of the emphasis in these reports is on macro-economic development, rather than on business management practices in Morocco. Indeed, in reviewing these sources, we found the archives remained silent on the impact that *Amazigh* culture has had on business practices, highlighting the core problem for business historians as they attempt to open up this debate. When one combines this silence with the lack of archives, it is clear that we need alternative ways of analysing the key historical influences on Moroccan management.

The absences we observed in available sources can be partially filled by a number of anthropological studies focusing on the *Imazighen*. These tell us of the importance of Islam, family ties and patronage (Geertz, 1979), the concepts of the Warrior-Saint (Leader) and *baraka* (good fortune/good luck) (Geertz, 1968), as well as the Moroccan digestion of Islam (Gellner, 1969). Islam in Morocco has historically oscillated between two contrasting forms: the scriptural, puritanical Islam of the urban literate classes—defined here as *pristine Islam* (Armstrong, 2007)—and the mystical, ritualistic Islam practiced by the rural *Amazigh* population, referred to as *Moroccan Islam* (Forster, 2014). The former emphasises moderation, scriptural purity, and direct communion with God, whilst the latter accepts hierarchy, spiritual mediation, and the guidance of Sufi Shaykhs and saintly marabouts (Geertz, 1968; Gellner, 1969).

The features of particular interest to scholars relate to the expectation within the culture of a certain kind of leadership – that of the ‘warrior-saint’ and the concept of *baraka*. They are inextricably linked. Geertz (1968, 1979) suggests that throughout the history of Morocco there has been a fusion of the secular – the warrior – with the religious – the saint. What was required of leaders was ‘strong man politics and holy-man piety... and the axial figure whether he was storming walls or building them, was the warrior saint’ (Geertz, 1968 p. 8). In *Imazighen* regions he was a combination of religious authority with social and military leadership. However, their leaders did not just have to simply display generally saint-like qualities, to speak for Islam and defend the faith, even taking up arms (Gellner, 1969), they had to have *baraka* (Geertz, 1968). In the Qur’an, the term *baraka* appears often and literally means ‘blessing.... [and] applies to whatever God has sent down by way of guidance and revelation’ (Leaman, 2006, p. 110). For the *Imazighen*, however, *baraka* took on a different inflection and became a form of spiritual charisma or good luck (Geertz, 1968). Geertz’s (1979) study of a traditional *Amazigh* town highlights how patronage is deeply rooted in extended family networks. In Moroccan society, the concepts of family, friendship, and patronage often merge in practice, even if linguistically distinguished (Geertz, 1979, p. 215). Moroccans construct broad social networks—effectively extended families—based on loyalty, shared obligations, and mutual support.

Central to these networks is the ‘patronage cluster,’ typically led by a powerful, wealthy man who supports and is supported by poorer kin acting as retainers (Geertz, 1979, p. 338–340). These retainers assist with tasks and represent the patron in social affairs, whilst remaining dependent on his influence and resources. He becomes the informal head of the household, maintaining authority through favours and loyalty (Geertz, 1979, p. 341).

Despite clear implications for business and management of these scholars’ observations, the voice and influence of the *Imazighen* remain largely silenced in the archives.

Methodological approach

Operationalising the ‘Stranger’

Schütz’s ‘Stranger’ is a conceptual device to help him explain how levels of ‘strangeness’ we may experience can enhance our ability to share and understand socio-historical contexts different from our own. He did not, however, put his idea to the ‘test’ by engaging in empirical study. We did. In this section we set out how we operationalised the hitherto theoretical ‘Stranger’ and employed it as a valuable cross-cultural research tool in qualitative fieldwork, enabling access to often inaccessible and unrecorded histories to explore the influence of the *Amazigh* culture on management practice in Morocco. In doing so, we demonstrate how this phenomenological approach to understanding and researching social life, incorporating elements of participant observation and ethnography, can be employed as a historical research method (Decker et al., 2023). We evidence how the researcher uses their otherness to elicit in-depth knowledge and understanding of cultures different to their own and how the ‘Stranger’ supports trustworthiness, authenticity (Guttormsen & Moore, 2023) and reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2016). Figure 1 provides the research process.

Figure 1 outlines how Schütz’s ‘Stranger’ can be used as a phenomenological tool for business historians and social scientists to understand better the dynamics in business environments that lack archival resources. First, the researcher needs to establish an appropriate research strategy and an interview protocol with prompts to establish how, from the participants’ lived experiences, the culture of Morocco’s indigenous people shapes management practice. Second, the researcher needs to identify a purposive sampling strategy. This ensures that the researcher engages with insiders who have shaped and experienced the subject of study, reflecting the dynamic between the outsider perspective of the ‘Stranger’ and the insider knowledge of participants. Third, the researcher should conduct an initial study to assess the feasibility of the proposed research approach. This enables the researcher to identify potential issues and refine the approach accordingly. Fourth, and to incorporate reflexivity, the researcher should maintain a reflexive diary (Cassell & Symon, 2004). This enables the researcher to not only reflect on presuppositions they hold and remain alert to how they may colour every stage of the research process, but also be consistent with the phenomenology approach, to enable the analysis of one interview informing the way in which the subsequent one is carried out (King, 2004). Fifth, the researcher conducts the main study. Interviews should be tape-recorded and transcribed as note-taking would involve re-interpretation of data, and it is the exact words from the participants that provide the in-depth insight of their lived experiences (Cunliffe, 2016). Sixth, the researcher reads and re-reads the full set of data, focusing on grasping the lived experiences of the managers, to identify where there is harmony and discord in experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Seventh,

Research Process Stages	Actions taken
Development of interview questions	Using the heuristic framework developed in the initial stages of the research an interview guide – with prompts – was established to explore how, from the participants’ lived experiences of how Morocco’s socio-historical context shapes management practice . At this stage the aim behind the interviews was to establish the appropriateness of the research strategy and questions. Questions refined to ensure they remained descriptive, experience-oriented and avoided assumptions (Cunliffe, 2016; Grenfell, 2014)
Identification of research participants via a purposive sampling approach	For the initial study, participants were identified through a Gatekeeper. I had provided the Gatekeeper with a profile of an ideal participant – someone with expertise and seniority with deep experiential insight on management practice and policy.
Initial Study	Five in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the texture and structure of experiences. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Participants were invited to reflect on their transcripts, offering additions or clarifications to deepen understanding.
Phenomenological Reflection (Reflexivity)	A reflexive journal was maintained throughout to support epoché (bracketing) and phenomenological reduction. Reflections included emotional reactions, methodological challenges, and emerging insights into participants’ lived experiences (Cassell & Symon, 2004)
Interviews	The main study with 19 participants was conducted, one interview by telephone. Each focused on detailed first-person accounts of their management experiences to enable ‘thick description’ (Jordanova, 2019 p. 108) Transcripts were sent back to participants for validation and further reflection.
Data Immersion and Holistic Reading	Transcripts were read and re-read holistically to grasp the essence of the lived experiences. Significant statements and emerging meanings were noted to identify common threads and divergences in experience.
Phenomenological Analysis (Meaning Units & Themes)	Transcripts were analysed by extracting meaning units, clustering them into themes, and identifying essential structures of experience. This was informed by van Manen’s phenomenological approach (1990), focusing on the how and the consciousness of experience. Biographical data informed comparative groupings reflecting their levels of “Stranger” (Duku 2007; Gherardi 1996; Schütz 1964)
Progressive Focusing	Through iterative re-engagement with the data, via open coding emergent themes were refined to capture multiplicity of lived realities, including ambiguity and paradox. Selective coding consolidated experiential themes into broader categories (Strauss & Corbin 1998)
Member Validation (Member Checking)	The draft analysis was shared with participants for phenomenological validation—ensuring that the developed themes resonated with their lived experiences (Cunliffe, 2016; Grenfell, 2014)
Phenomenological Theorising	Themes were synthesized with existing literature to develop a phenomenologically grounded interpretation of how Islamic values influence management practice in Morocco. The heuristic framework was revised to reflect the essential meanings and experiential structures derived from participants’ narratives.

Figure 1. Phenomenological research process (Jordanova, 2019).

the research follows an iterative process of re-reading interview transcripts, identifying emerging themes, and refining interpretations and inferences based on the participants' own sense-making of their everyday life, rather than from any previous knowledge the researcher may have. In this sense, the phenomenological attitude mirrors the abductive process advocated by Wadhwani and Decker (2017), as in both cases the researcher must remain open to being surprised by the experiences recalled. They must also be prepared to revise their understanding of the phenomenon under investigation in the light of the participants' meanings, rather than imposing rigid theoretical frameworks. Eighth, the individual accounts of participants are re-examined *via* a process of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and allocated to themes which capture the consensus, contradiction, paradox, and ambiguity.

The next stage of selective coding enables the researcher to progressively focus these themes into broader categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ninth, member validation enables participants to review the findings with the goal of improving the accuracy and credibility of the research. Finally, by synthesising the interpretive analysis of interviews with existing historical archival sources, the business historian develops a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how the *Amazigh* culture has influenced management practice in Morocco.

Sample and participants

Using purposive sampling (Suri, 2011), we selected 24 managers in Morocco to interview – individuals with expertise and seniority – with direct experience not just of receiving/living management policy and practice but also of directly shaping and dispensing policy and practice. As can be seen from Table 1, in effect this meant Chief Executive or Board-level executives across a broad range of industries and businesses.

In addition, to reflect the true nature of commercial activities in Morocco, participants were selected from foreign multinationals pre-eminent in their respective consumer markets, as well as those organisations that were Moroccan-owned. There also had to be a mix of male and female managers, again to ensure 'believability' required of qualitative research (Brewer, 2004, p. 157). However, the phenomenological approach of this research – in particular the use of the 'Stranger' as a methodological tool – demanded that selected participants also came from different socio-historical backgrounds. The 'Stranger' is trying to make sense of a world to which they are not accustomed, where they have no 'thinking-as-usual', nor sharing of the cultural recipes which inform values and behaviours. As a result, this individual must navigate and question the foundational knowledge of this unfamiliar world to make sense of their experiences. They shed light in places 'insiders' take for granted in their own context. Gherardi (1996, p. 190) also talks of the need for 'outsiders' in research situations for the exact same reason because insight can be derived from those with no attachment to the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in the phenomenon under exploration. It was evident that there should be participants in this research process – in addition to the researcher herself – who had varying levels of 'strangeness' to the Moroccan management context, and thus would experience and make sense of this relatively new world to achieve the insight and 'representativeness' (Locke, 2001, p. 80) required of a methodology that could aid understanding in the absence of other data. Interviews took place in 2008 and 2009.

Table 1. Participants.

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Type of organisation	Position in organisation
Ibrahim	Man	Moroccan	Moroccan SME	MD/Owner
Malek	Man	Moroccan	Moroccan SME	MD/Owner
Aziz	Man	Moroccan	National Bank	Director
Nicolas	Man	'Stranger'	Moroccan owned hotel	Director-General
Jamila	Woman	*Moroccan	Consultancy	Director
Zidan	Man	Moroccan	Multinational	Operations Manager
Uthman	Man	Moroccan	Multinational	Health and Safety Manager
Walid	Man	Moroccan	Self-employed consultant	
Amina	Woman	Moroccan	Multinational	HR Director
Loubna	Woman	Moroccan	Multinational	Sales Director
Amal	Woman	Moroccan	Multinational	Deputy-Director General
Nadia	Woman	Moroccan	Self-employed consultant	
Ismail	Man	Moroccan	Multinational	Managing Director
Abdul	Man	Moroccan	International Moroccan Co.	Director General/President
Omar	Man	Moroccan	Multinational	Country Manager
Yasin	Man	Moroccan	Multinational	Logistics Manager
Ahmad	Man	Moroccan	International Moroccan Co.	Managing Director/Owner
Amir	Man	Moroccan	Consultancy	Director/Joint Owner
Fatiha	Woman	Moroccan	Consultancy	Director General/Owner
Daouia	Woman	Moroccan	Multinational	Marketing and Sales Director
Paul	Man	'Stranger'	Multinational	Country Manager
Atif	Man	'Stranger'	Multinational	Managing Director
Michael	Man	'Stranger'	Multinational	Country Manager
David	Man	'Stranger'	Multinational	Country Manager

*Jamila is French-born Moroccan but considers herself to be Moroccan.

Sampling was initially facilitated by using a 'gate keeper' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 75) – the Director General of an exclusive Moroccan boutique hotel in Marrakech – who identified participants, including himself. To achieve 'believability' (Brewer, 2004, p. 157), the location of the main study had to be Casablanca, which is Morocco's industrial and business centre with a degree of domestic dominance far in excess of the international norm. Basly (2017) warns of the degree to which businesses in the Arab World prioritise confidentiality and secrecy and are reluctant to engage in research projects. More specifically to Morocco, other researchers (Benson & Al Arkoubi, 2006) have also highlighted their own challenges of recruiting research participants, a challenge that this project also faced. Identifying and approaching participants for the research, including those found through the process of 'snowballing' (Brewer, 2000, p. 80), took many months of effort, including: communication with the UK Ambassador in Morocco; taking advantage of family member networks of ex-colleagues whose organisations have a significant presence in Morocco; and the use of a local market research company to identify and then recruit participants for the research.

Data collection

The objective of the research was to understand and explore how, in the absence of archives, the *Amazigh* culture influenced management practice *via* those who experience the phenomenon under investigation. To capture 'the voices' of these people (Brewer, 2004, p. 313) – and remain consistent with the phenomenological approach to this work – the researcher

had to participate 'directly in the setting... in order to collect data... but without meaning being imposed on them externally' (Brewer, 2004, p. 6), including any presuppositions about the phenomenon under investigation (King, 2004, p. 12). Semi-structured interviews were selected by the researcher¹ for this purpose, as well as the use of a reflexive diary to monitor and reflect on the research process, and explore her experiences (Cunliffe, 2016). These collection methods ensured that, as a 'Stranger', the lead researcher/interviewer was in the position to personally check, to question, and to reach understanding and insight regarding the 'real' nature of management practice in Morocco. Unusually given the distances involved, all but one (which was conducted by telephone) of the interviews were face-to-face. Whilst conducting the interviews, the researcher also engaged in 'informal' observations at each 'site' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) which were shared with participants during the interview, as were the findings from other interviews to identify dissonance and harmony in perspectives. Lincoln and Guba (1985), Miles and Huberman (1984), and Creswell (1984) suggest this helps establish the 'trustworthiness' of the research. The research received full ethical approval from the lead author's University Ethics Committee. All participants consented to taking part in the research and completed a signed consent form.

Data analysis

To analyse the data, we followed an abductive reasoning process that supported our phenomenological theorising (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Abduction enables an 'ampliative and conjectural mode of inquiry' through which the researcher explores 'hunches, explanatory propositions, ideas, and theoretical elements' that arise with the 'recognition of puzzling observations that enable us to discern and construct new plots' (Locke et al., 2008, p. 907–908). After reading the scripts, the participants were allocated to one of four groups according to biographical data. Allocation to four groups was not pre-planned but emerged from the nature of the participants interviewed. The initial plan was to choose complete outsiders, as well as insiders, as part of the participant profile for reasons set out earlier. However, during the interviews and the first stages of analysis it became apparent that the Moroccan participants could be sub-divided further based on some form of 'Stranger' experience in relation to a complete 'Insider', that is, a participant who had studied and worked all their lives in Morocco. The groups were named: Insiders – Moroccan Muslims (participants with only Moroccan experiences); Insiders-Outsiders – Moroccan Muslim (participants with work and/or education experience abroad); Outsiders-Insiders – Moroccan non-Muslim participants; Strangers – foreigners. Table 2 sets out the allocation of participants to these groups.

These groups emerged from the interview process and the first stages of analysis. As a result, one of the groups – that of the Outsider-Insider – is not represented to any great extent. It was only discovered that Nadia was Jewish at the interview itself, and whilst her voice therefore cannot be 'representative', nevertheless it should still be heard. Analysis of the data was progressed using both open and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process began with open coding, an iterative process of reading and re-reading scripts to identify themes under which the data could be coded. Once these open codes had been established, sub-themes were created to ensure a 'polyphony of the voices' (Brewer, 2000, p. 124). The next stage of the analysis was to bring the now fractured text (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) back together to enable the identification of broader themes, to refine and distil further the data consistent with the process of

Table 2. Participant groups.

Insiders	Strangers
Ibrahim	Nicolas
Malek	Paul
Aziz	Atif
Walid	Michael
Zidan	David
Uthman	
Amina	
Loubna	
Amal	
Outsiders-Insiders	Insiders-Outsiders
Nadia	Ismail
	Abdul
	Omar
	Yasin
	Ahmad
	Amir
	Fatiha
	Jamila
	Daouia

progressive focusing. This followed the principle of selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by looking at how broader themes were developed under which the data could be categorised. In addition to this work, a heuristic framework was developed to provide some *a priori* knowledge before embarking on the process of exploring what was unknown as a 'Stranger' (Schütz, 1964).

In the next section we present a summary of our findings that demonstrate how the *Amazigh* culture has influenced management practices in Morocco.

Summary of the key findings

It is not our aim to set out in detail the findings of the research study for which our methodology was designed (see Forster, 2014, Forster & Fenwick, 2015, for a detailed account). Rather, we use extracts from the findings to demonstrate how, in the absence of archives, Schütz's phenomenological approach provides in-depth insights into the influences of the *Imazighen* on management practice in Morocco. The research findings identified three socio-historical influences, or themes, that are part of the everyday experience of managers in Morocco, and which importantly can be traced back to the *Amazigh* culture (Geertz, 1968, 1979; Gellner, 1969). Names of interviewees are given, either in parentheses or in the text.

Theme 1 – the influence of 'Moroccan Islam'

Participants attest that there are two forms of Islam in Morocco: the 'pure' Islam taken from the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*; and the second, what David described as 'a culture's ingestion of a religion'. It is Islam interpreted through the cultural traditions of Morocco's indigenous peoples, the *Imazighen*, and their beliefs in *Mektoub* (destiny), with associated interpretations of *Insha'allah* (God Willing), *Baraka* (good luck/good fortune) and the importance of and need for the 'warrior-saint', a leader with 'strong man politics and holy-man piety' (Geertz, 1968, p. 8). This is the Sufi form of Islam, with an emphasis on the mystical that suits the

Moroccan temperament (Gellner, 1969). All participants acknowledged the active influence of this ingested form of Islam on both management practice and on doing business, as it continues to shape Moroccans' attitudes and behaviours. For instance, Ahmad shared that in his food distribution business Moroccans

want to work for or buy from someone who has the *baraka*... a big boss [sic] who says his prayers...If you are a good person, if you are religious, if God is with you, I will prosper. If you are not a good person and I buy this from you I will lose money on it ok.

Abdul described his father as both a businessman and a professor of religion from whom he has learned 'an honest and frank way of doing business in order to promote trust'. This approach had maintained customer relationships for over thirty years. Moroccan Islam, however, can also be regarded as having a detrimental effect on management practice. Many participants critiqued the Moroccan interpretation of *Insha'Allah* which changed the original religious meaning from 'help yourself and God will help you' (David) into a more fatalistic and passive approach to life and work, thus enabling the use of it as 'an excuse not to take responsibility for [their] actions, to be helpless' (Loubna). In management terms, this restricted individual initiative, accountability and, according to Atif 'stifles creativity and restricts business opportunities' and 'excuses lack of performance' (Nicolas). Our analysis demonstrates that Islam and Moroccan Islam are not static points on a spectrum; rather, they are dynamic forces that interact, merge and diverge. The divergence occurs because Moroccan Islam is inherently rooted in cultural traditions. Moreover, this cultural entrenchment allows it to blend with other aspects of the national character, giving it a unique and distinctive form which in turn influences management in Morocco.

Theme 2 – family and patrimony

The concept of family, closely tied to patrimony, emerged as a central theme in participants' discussions. Many emphasised the importance of the organisation feeling like 'one big happy family' where values such as benevolence, helping others, and *la solidarité* are practiced. Amal spoke of 'fraternity' in terms of how she supports her employees both professionally and personally. Daouia shared that they 'celebrate the births and provide for the children' of employees. Omar also gave an example of his organisation covering full medical costs and salary for a seriously ill employee, despite the legal obligation being only 30%. However, it is Zidan's vignette on this topic that strongly resonates with the observations of Geertz (1979) on the system of patrimony. He describes a typical Moroccan scenario which is based on trust and respect:

You take the most important industrial local groups, they don't talk about honour, they talk about families. You will always find someone who has started with their father who is still there. You come into the organization today 2009, and ask what are we paying that guy for? He is there, he has a car, he has a big salary. And if you ask that question to the big boss, president of the company, he will say I know what I am paying him for, you cannot understand. Knowing that the guy has no diploma, he did not graduate from the university, nothing. But that guy built the company with our father. That guy took risks for our father. When our father died he was the one who cried the most for the loss of our father and is a really trustworthy person. He stays.

The anecdotes above have one thing in common, that in the traditional Moroccan culture ‘family’ is an inherent value embedded in everyday life, including the workplace. There is an expectation of how organisations ‘work’ based on mutually supportive relationships. Family and patrimony are inextricably linked with the next theme.

Theme 3 – leadership and patriarchy

Although Abdul does not refer to his leadership style as patriarchal, the example he gives below demonstrates how patriarchy in Morocco could be interpreted and ‘made sense of’. In this example, Abdul is referring to the level of quality that he demands from his employees:

They are not scared of the clients, they are scared of me, of my position.... Yesterday I was very angry with the people here because they sold copy to a client and I was not happy [with the quality] and the client he was ok, but I said no. Even if the client is ok, I am not ok, because I don’t believe in this, so you have to work more and I was very angry.... But on the other hand, I am very near to all the problems of people working here..... I help them, I will do my best to encourage them. If somebody needs money to buy an apartment, I give it to them.....

David sees the situation thus: that in 99.9% of local Moroccan companies there is ‘a dictatorial patriarchal boss’. He ‘sees’ it as a cultural characteristic deriving from the *Imazighen*. He explains:

The Berbers² [sic].... they have like a code of honour, like the Middle Ages knights.... they would blindly trust and follow their leader – which most of the time was the elder, patriarchal guy of the tribe. There is a blind trust of the leader in the Berber culture.

From her point of view, Amal believes that for older Moroccans especially, there is a *modus operandi* which is underpinned by the attitude:

They are the boss, so the boss is right all the time and you can’t discuss it. If I am their leader, they want me to make the decisions. That’s my job as leader.

And according to Yasin, if you do not work this way as a leader ‘you are seen as weak’. In Morocco, patriarchy would appear to have several facets. It can be about the extended family and patronage (Geertz, 1979) – an aspect of family best exemplified by Zidan’s stories of loyalty and commitment described in the previous theme. It can be authoritarian, as David describes leadership in Moroccan companies. But what emerges is that an authoritarian style of leadership is expected by Moroccan employees, and failure to lead in this way, according to Yasin, gives rise to easy perceptions of weakness and insipidity in a manager.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we have demonstrated how Schütz’s phenomenological approach provides in-depth insights into the influences of the *Imazighen* on management practice in Morocco, thus improving cross-cultural insight and understanding, to compensate for the acute absence of appropriate archival material. We evidence this in empirical work undertaken by the lead author by exploring how *Amazigh* cultural traditions and values have influenced business and management practices in Morocco. Our analysis reveals how Schütz’s (1944) ‘Stranger’ offers a uniquely valuable phenomenological approach to conducting business

history research. Had this approach not been pursued, the project would not have been able to generate the kind of deep insights called for by Decker (2022). Thus, we demonstrate the effectiveness of a new methodology that business historians could very well adopt. To our knowledge, this approach has not previously been used in business history research.

Our approach demonstrates how, where archival records are scarce or even absent, adopting the persona of the 'Stranger' enables us to uncover silences that would otherwise go unheard, revealing secrets that would remain buried. Our empirical research also reveals how the 'Stranger' gave our researcher entry into the very 'life-worlds' of those who experience the phenomenon under consideration, thus capturing their true voices (Brewer, 2000; Guttormsen & Moore, 2023) with intimacy and authenticity and allowing us to clarify and convey the socio-historical context of management practice in Morocco. Moreover, given the paucity of archival coverage, business historians would benefit enormously from adopting this methodology as a means of coping with the lack of primary evidence on the influence of Islamic values on management practice.

There are a number of theoretical and conceptual insights that arise from our research. Crucially, phenomenology is both a philosophy and a method (Gill, 2014) that we operationalise through the 'Stranger'. This approach enables us to research the past and explore the 'silenced and non-documented aspects of history' with historiographical reflexivity (Decker et al., 2021, p. 1138) and dual integrity (Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014) that enables theorisation and method. The location of our phenomenological research in retrospective organisational history (Decker et al., 2021) in particular is a contribution to this under-researched area of business history. Our phenomenological approach provides a nuanced and trustworthy (Gill et al., 2018) understanding of the sensitivities and limitations of researching complex, cross-cultural contexts where there are absences and silences in the archives (Verhoef, 2017) that culminate in voices omitted from history and the continued preservation of official versions of the past (Decker et al., 2021). Our abductive theorising also demonstrates how adopting the persona of the 'Stranger' supports the researcher's own reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2016; Wadhvani & Decker, 2017), providing researcher 'trustworthiness' and veracity of findings in an alien sociocultural context. With such theorising business historians can learn extensively from the absence of archives in less developed countries. It is to these insights that we append our contribution.

Our approach has significant implications for both business practice and policy. For business practice, the 'Stranger' perspective can enhance cross-cultural understanding by encouraging businesses to reflect on local cultural dynamics, such as the interplay between Islamic values and Moroccan traditions in management. Recognising the dual influence of Islam, both as a religious and culturally 'ingested' form, can help organisations align their practices with local expectations, reducing the risk of cultural missteps. Additionally, businesses might need to adapt leadership styles to accommodate the cultural emphasis on familial and patriarchal structures in Morocco. Although Western participatory approaches might be desirable, they could also need to be balanced with paternalistic styles that align with employee expectations and traditional norms.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest the need for government initiatives that support research and archival development to address the current 'silence of the archives.' Developing local research infrastructures can aid historical and cultural understanding of Moroccan business practices. Levels of patriarchy within organisations suggest that policy-makers might also investigate gender equality by introducing measures to reduce cultural

and structural barriers for women in the workplace, thereby promoting equal opportunities. Education reform is another critical area where policymakers might consider reforms aimed at enhancing critical thinking, initiative, and accountability to better align with the needs of modern businesses. These policies should aim to preserve Morocco's unique cultural identity whilst promoting modernisation. This balance is essential to ensure that economic growth does not erode traditional values that resonate with the local population.

Our research suggests some interesting and novel areas for future research. First, our research is specific to the context of Morocco, and privately owned organisations or multi-nationals in particular. Further empirical research is required to explore how phenomenological research using the 'Stranger' might be applied across different contexts, geographies or cultures. For instance, even in Morocco, greater exploration of the public sector and also of *Imazighen*-owned organisations would help us understand in greater depth this country which is so devoid of archival data. Second, further consideration should be given to the use of phenomenological approaches in business history research in combination with, and in the absence of, archival sources (Gill et al., 2018). Third, another area ripe for exploration lies in considering different degrees of insider/outsider affiliation in the context of using the 'Stranger' as a phenomenological approach. By focusing on 'people like us' we are in danger of demonising and making 'others' the 'Stranger'. Our suggestions provide a fruitful basis for further research in a business history context that is informed by the tenets of phenomenological social science, filling to a significant extent the 'silence of the archive'.

Notes

1. The primary data for the research was collected by the lead author.
2. The term 'Berber' derives from the Greek word *barbari* (barbarian) and is now regarded as a pejorative term by many.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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